

Tribal Group  
1-4 Portland  
Square  
Bristol  
BS2 8RR  
T 0845 123 6001  
F 0845 123 6002

T 08456 40 40 40  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



11 December 2008

Mr G Watson  
The Headteacher  
Maidenhill School  
Kings Road  
Stonehouse  
Gloucestershire  
GL10 2HA

Dear Mr Watson

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Maidenhill School

Following my visit with Anthony Shield, Additional Inspector, to your school on 9 and 10 December 2008, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in November 2006. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – good.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website. Please inform the Regional Inspection Service Provider of any factual inaccuracies within 24 hours of the receipt of this letter.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Group Director of Children's and Young People's Services for Gloucestershire.

Yours sincerely

Mary Harlow  
H M Inspector

## Special measures: monitoring of Maidenhill School

Report from the fifth monitoring inspection on 9 December 2008

### Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents, and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle managers, two groups of students, the chair and vice chair of governors, the finance manager, the National Leader in Education, the National Challenge Advisor and two representatives from the local authority.

### Context

Following the fourth monitoring visit in June 2008, a new permanent headteacher took up post in September 2008. The school has been successful in recruiting some promising new staff and the staffing at the school is now considerably more stable than on previous visits. This is helping to create a calmer, more purposeful atmosphere and improved relationships between teachers and students. Two members of staff remain on long term absence.

The school has benefited from a minor refurbishment programme to the main corridor and a new catering facility to support the growth of vocational courses. Such improvements to the tired fabric of the school building are having a positive impact on staff and student morale. There are plans in place to improve the entrance and reception area next term and architects have recently been appointed to produce designs for a new combined sports and performing arts centre. The school has been nominated as one in four in Gloucestershire to be forwarded for Phase 1 Building Schools for the Future (BSF) funding.

### Achievement and standards

Standards are improving, but remain too low, particularly for students of average ability at GCSE. The proportion of students achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE improved in 2008 and, at 49%, was the highest for many years. These results were also a marked improvement on the 35% who achieved this threshold in 2007. However, value added measures indicate that lower and middle ability students and boys in particular made least progress, and this is a concern which has remained since the last inspection. Some subjects did well. Dance, performing arts, music technology, catering and resistant materials all performed considerably above the challenging targets set. Performance in English and mathematics is less impressive. Only 28% of students achieved five or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics, below the national floor target. Boys in particular underachieved with only 16% reaching this level, in comparison with 41% of girls. Improvements in science and mathematics were not matched by English where only 35% achieved an A\* to C grade.

At Key Stage 3, a similar picture emerges. A poor performance in English contrasts with improvements in mathematics and science. A significant minority of students, nearly 40%, made no apparent progress in English through Years 7, 8 and 9. Performance in English and, to a lesser extent, mathematics is a drag on the school's overall performance. Weak literacy and numeracy skills are a barrier to more rapid progress in all subjects.

Evidence from the inspection confirms that of examination and test performance. Good progress in some subjects, notably in the humanities and the performing arts, is not matched by similar rates of progress in all subjects, especially English and mathematics. Ironing out the inconsistent progress made by students in different subjects remains a significant challenge for the school.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve standards and students' achievement, especially for the average attaining students, in English, mathematics and science – satisfactory.

#### Personal development and well-being

Student behaviour continues to improve and although it remains satisfactory overall there is a considerable increase in the proportion of good behaviour observed in lessons. Students report that when teachers provide them with stimulating, practical activities where they can take control of their learning, behaviour is good. They are right. In lessons in science, the humanities and the performing arts, sanctions are used sparingly if at all. A positive climate for learning exists and relationships are harmonious and respectful. There is often humour and friendly banter and this adds to the students' enjoyment of the lesson. That said when teaching is too directed and controlling, stubborn pockets of low level disruption are still in evidence and students show a lack of respect for the teachers. Behaviour around the school is also much improved. A greater number of students open doors for the adults and greet them confidently with friendly smiles. However, there is still some boisterous behaviour by a few students in the corridors despite the diligent supervision by staff.

The behaviour observed in the excellent assembly, where students performed a play that recently won several awards at a local festival, was exemplary. All were captivated by the high quality of the drama observed in the production of *Out of the Box*. It was indeed a poignant, moving occasion and a joy to witness. Such experiences, including the dance production taking place during the visit, are contributing significantly to the students' personal development and self esteem. The behaviour for learning programme continues to work well but students report that there is some inconsistency in how it is applied by the teachers.

Without exception the students talked enthusiastically about how the new headteacher has made a difference for the better to their life at school. They appreciate his high visibility, his willingness to get to know them and their names.

They now feel their voice really matters and they value the improvements made to the school council. Students also welcome the increased opportunities to take responsibility for links with community especially through the performing arts activities. Attendance remains satisfactory and the number of exclusions has reduced considerably this term. There are sensible strategies such as 'Missing u' in place to tackle persistent absence. Punctuality to school and lessons overall continues to improve.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- significantly reduce the poor behaviour of the minority of students – good.

### Quality of provision

The stability of the teaching staff is contributing significantly to the continued improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. Although this is still satisfactory overall, there are an increasing number of good lessons, particularly in science, the humanities and the performing arts. In these lessons there is a clear focus on learning and the students are given responsibility through stimulating independent and group tasks which motivate them to make good progress. Notable examples observed were topics on medicine and respiration in science, group presentations in English and drama, a class dance performance, and work in geography about industry. Teaching was, however, dull in an English lesson and several mathematics lessons. There was a high level of teacher talk at the expense of student learning, and insufficient opportunities were provided for the students to engage in discussion and group work. This impacted adversely on their learning, attitudes and behaviour, and they became disinterested. The learning environment in the science block is good but in some other classrooms displays still vary in quality. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning across the school and are tackling weaknesses assiduously.

Although the curriculum was not a particular focus for this visit, the strengths noted in the developments in vocational provision at the last monitoring visit have continued. Plans by the new headteacher to review the curriculum to improve provision further are timely and apt. The school continues to provide a secure and caring environment for its students. Students' understanding of their targets for improvement is developing well and there is a greater reference to these in teachers' plans and in lessons. Appropriate procedures to ensure the students' safety, welfare and protection are in place and safeguarding measures meet statutory requirements.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning so that variations in standards in different subjects are markedly reduced – satisfactory.

## Leadership and management

The new headteacher has made an impressive start. He has quickly gained the respect of staff and students, and given the school fresh direction and hope. His impact on staff and student morale has been significant. The school is now facing up to some of the more stubborn issues which remain with greater confidence.

The senior team has been restructured, affording clearer lines of responsibility and accountability, as well as providing opportunities for a more strategic whole school role for these key partners in school improvement. Middle leadership has rightly been a key priority for development. The quality of their leadership is patchy. Good leadership in science, design and technology, humanities and performing arts is not matched consistently elsewhere. Crucially, improvements in English and mathematics are being held back by the weak leadership of these subjects. The school has well conceived plans for improvement in both its raising achievement plan and school development plan. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and realistic and informed by good use of performance data. However, self-evaluation is not yet threaded through all the school's monitoring processes nor does it systematically involve the whole staff and governors.

Governors are hard working and committed. Their dedication to the school is evident and their willingness to do what is best for the students is clear. However, much of the work is falling disproportionately on a small handful of governors who lack both the experience and training to carry out their roles effectively. Both in terms of supporting the school in strategic planning and in holding the school to account, governance is inadequate.

Systems for the assessment and tracking of students have been refined and much improved. They are now much simpler and clearer. The analysis, interpretation and use of data by all staff are much more precise and effective. Target setting has a clarity which it previously lacked. Potential underachievement is identified more effectively and intervention programmes to support students are put in place more rapidly.

The school's specialist college status is developing well at a strategic level and there are sensible plans in place to take this specialist work forward both within school and the wider community. Good links have been established with a local special school and three partner primary schools together with nearby theatre venues. However, more needs to be done to ensure that the specialist status impacts positively on raising standards and achievement across the school. Students report accurately that the quality of specialist provision in the performing arts is good. This is reflected in the good achievements of many students in the examination results. That said, the school recognises the importance to strive continually to improve standards in the performing arts subjects in line with the requirements of specialist status.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- make better use of assessment information and monitor the school's provision systematically and rigorously to improve performance and standards – good.

### External support

The school continues to value the support received from the local authority consultants and the leader for intervention and challenge. The partnership established in September by the local authority between the school and the John Cabot Learning Federation as part of the National Challenge project is a very positive initiative. The National Leader in Education is providing excellent support and appropriate challenge. The governors' repeated requests this term to the local authority for additional support, in order to strengthen their capacity to improve, have not, as yet, been successfully resolved. This lack of support to the governing body is having a detrimental effect on the school's overall capacity to improve and requires urgent attention and action. The local authority, coupled with the John Cabot Learning Federation, is providing ongoing support to tackle the difficult financial issues facing the school.

### Priorities for further improvement

- Improve the effectiveness of the leadership in English and mathematics in order to raise standards.
- Strengthen the capacity of the governing body to ensure it holds the school to account in a rigorous manner.